



HD 6228 (S1)

HD 6

C102

Threads





TAKEN FOR THE CHILD LABOR CAMPAIGN, JUST
AS SHE CAME OUT FROM A COTTON
MILL IN SHANGHAI

Threads

THE STORY OF THE INDUSTRIAL WORK

OF THE

Y. W. C. A. IN CHINA

1925



NATIONAL COMMITTEE

YOUNG WOMEN'S CHRISTIAN ASSOCIATION

OF CHINA

SHANGHAI

[1925]

THREADS.

"Suddenly we came out of the dark street onto an open square, set against the gray old city wall. A lot of Chinese girls had spread their weaving here. Six feet up from the ground suspended over the whole square hung a web of glistening threads like an enormous cobweb. The blue-coated, barefooted girls passed back and forth on the grass, down the silken lanes, tending their work. I could well imagine that the threads would sometime lead them into a modern factory, to work for long, shut-in shifts, at modern machines.

"Remembering all the people who were thinking about that transition that is coming to China so fast, from a group of club girls in America, studying about 'Chinese women in industry,' to the people in the international labor office of the League of Nations, I thought again of Mrs. Raymond Robins' word about China, saying that 'labor's kinship is as wide as life.' It was as though one heard a shuttling back and forth across the oceans. It seemed like a great, unseen sort of weaving, drawing the world together into a friendly whole——."

[N 1910, at its world's conference in Berlin, the Young Women's Christian Association first considered whether it had responsibility for the conditions under which women and children work in factories. "The great conference carried back to its component countries, a seed of uneasiness——." This bore fruit in national experiments here and there. The Y.W.C.A. of Great Britain for example developed a strong Legislative Committee, for giving expert help to working women regarding protective laws. The Association in America developed the group consciousness of its thousands of industrial members so that all the other kinds of members became vitally aware of them, not as an "industrial problem" but as human beings, friends; and at its national conventions it took so fearless a stand on such matters as collective bargaining, the eight hour day, etc., that it suffered financial loss but thus helped to identify Christianity with social right.

Ten years after the Berlin Conference, the world's Y.W.C.A. conference of 1920, meeting in a Swiss village in the Alps, passed another industrial milestone. Drawing upon its close relationship to and knowledge of women in practically all countries, the Association at this Champéry conference affirmed its industrial responsibility in such concrete terms as:

Children - Employment

- China

1922-23

the desirability of the Y.W.C.A. encouraging right organization among women workers, of its endorsing through its national branches, the international labor standards adopted at the Washington Labor Conference of 1919, etc. These conclusions were based on a tremendous conviction as to "the equal value of every human life to national and international as well as to personal relations."

Immediately following the Champéry Conference, the World's Committee of the Y.W.C.A. for the first time appointed an industrial secretary, in the person of Miss Mary Dingman of the American Y.W.C.A., and a little later formed an industrial committee chaired, as it still is, by Miss Constance Smith, H. M. Deputy Chief Inspector of Factories under the British Government.

Meanwhile, the dramatic interest in Y.W.C.A. industrial history was tending to shift somewhat from the West to the East. This was only natural as public interest in general, along political and economic lines, begins to turn in that direction.

ONE of the delegates at Champéry had been Grace Coppock, national secretary of the Association in China. As surely as one saw the Swiss valleys from the slopes of the Alps, Miss Coppock and others could see from beginnings in the West, what was coming to the oriental countries as they began to be industrialized. Japan and India were ahead of China in industrial development. Both had strong governments and were to a small degree at least trying to regulate their rapidly developing industries. In neither country had the Christian forces as such had much if anything to say, as modern industry fastened itself upon the oriental labor market. The same thing was beginning in China, which for law enforcement would not be able to count upon its government for a long while.

At the same time, in the revealing light of the war, the nationals of the oriental countries were beginning to ask, "Why do you bring us Christianity, if it must come accom-

panied by this western 'civilization' which we do not want?" Christianity had a superb chance early in the game, to speak for the human beings who were going to be drawn into China's factories, and to seek the co-operation of employers, for starting modern industry on a decent basis before it should become too strongly entrenched.

Through Grace Coppock's interest an English secretary, Agatha Harrison, was added to the staff of the China Y.W.C.A. in 1921. Watching this beginning in China from afar Florence Simms, the prophet leader of industrial work in the American Y.W.C.A., who died soon after, wrote to Miss Coppock, "Your news made me want to shout for joy. As you know, for us in America this is a time of reaction. There is fear on all sides. Perhaps for a while all we can do is to build our defenses. What you are doing in China will help us in that." From now on, the industrial developments in China became to all who were following them, a symbol of the struggle for industrial right which is constantly going on all around the world. It was to be a four-year affair, which has just come to another milestone in this summer of 1925.

MOST of the denominations and other Christian agencies in China are united in a National Christian Council which in a good many realms is able to act for the Protestant Church as a whole. Although the Y.W.C.A. took the first steps, towards a joint industrial program for the Church, it chose to lose itself as quickly as possible in this larger whole. A year after Miss Harrison's landing in China, at the great National Christian Conference called by this body in Shanghai, May 1922, the Church went on record as opposed to child labor, and believing in the necessity of one day's rest in seven and of provision for the health and safety of industrial workers. Considering that this conference in a sense marked the end of the mission era and the beginning of the Chinese Christian Church, this was rather an astonishing seven-league step to take right at the beginning, and was watched with keen interest from many other parts of the world.

Miss Harrison, and Miss Zung Wei Tsung, Chinese industrial secretary for the Y.W.C.A., continued their work through the Industrial Committee of the National Christian Council. When Miss Harrison had to return to England, Miss Dingman was loaned to China by the World's Committee of the Y.W.C.A. for a year and a half. Miss Shin Tak Hin, after a year of special training at the London School of Economics, also came to the Y.W.C.A. staff, so that now though Miss Dingman returns to her regular post in London, two experienced Chinese secretaries are established in the more permanent work of carrying on. Beginning in the autumn of 1925 Miss Lily K. Haass, for eight years a Y.W.C.A. secretary in Peking, is loaned by the Association to lead the Industrial Committee of the National Christian Council. The Y.W.C.A. works so closely with the Council in this field that it is hard to distinguish its separate functions, but that is a minor point.

Ever since these great new subjects were brought before the Church at the Conference of 1922, this Industrial Committee has been at work along the lines of research and study of industrial conditions in many parts of China, and of the slow formation of the public opinion which will have to be created before these can be changed. The Chinese people like concrete and practical things. On the other hand, their social unit for thousands of years has been the family, not the community, and this has formed a deep racial instinct not to "interfere" in matters of public concern. The awakening of the social conscience in this country will thus have both its helps and its handicaps. In spite of a century or so of social reform in the West, we who are foreign also bring certain handicaps to this situation in China. It is not always clear how far the church should consider its responsibility in economic or political issues to extend. There is also no established tradition on the part of the mission boards for sending experienced social workers to the orient on the same scale as those sent for education, medicine and evangelism. To help to change this tradition is one of the most fascinating problems of the Industrial Committee of the National Christian Council for China.

While this educational process goes on in many cities and schools throughout China, one special issue has been lifted to prominence, for friends in many countries to watch. "No child labor" was taken as the most appealing and definite of the standards adopted by the National Christian Conference, to be put into effect. The International Settlement of Shanghai itself was chosen as the best laboratory for this experiment, since the condition of China's own government made it impossible to try to enforce Peking's provisional labor standards in Chinese territory.

The Shanghai Municipal Council was found to be willing to form a commission to consider how child labor could gradually be reduced in the Settlement. Dame Adelaide Anderson, for many years Chief Lady Factory Inspector for the British Government, came to China for ten months to contribute of her technical skill and ripe human wisdom to this commission. A carefully chosen group of Chinese and foreign men and women worked hard for a year and then brought in a report which if accepted would gradually raise the working age to twelve years, achieve a gradual reduction of the shockingly long working hours, and provide for inspection. The recommendations were mild in themselves, but so much better than existing conditions that they were all that could be asked for at first.

During the winter of 1924-25 the industrial committee did heroic work leading up to the necessary voting upon these measures by the citizens of Shanghai.

WE are on our fifth page of this record and the human beings most concerned have not come before our eyes. At this very moment of writing, we chance to know that as but one small instance of many, in a hospital a few blocks away there are these two accident cases from two different silk mills in Shanghai. One is a small boy of ten, who was brought in the other morning with his lips torn to ribbons and his jaw almost fractured because after a twelve-hour night shift he had fallen against the machinery at four a.m.—

and he has worked under these conditions since he was a baby of seven for 10 cents gold a day. The other is a seventeen-year-old girl who during a shift of twelve and a half hours wavered near the flying wheels and had her scalp torn from her head.

One does not speak much of the workers. So large a percentage of them are illiterate, and labor organization is as yet so little developed along substantial lines, that to foreigners at least they cannot speak for themselves. But even then one hesitates to pile up the actual facts,—they do not sound real.

The civilized world, however, will no longer endure that our comfort and possessions should be built upon the bodies of little children. The word that poured in to Shanghai during the spring campaign of 1925 from backers all around the world was nothing short of amazing. It forms so large a part of the weaving which is irresistibly bringing the countries together in a common concern for those who work by hand, that a roll-call of these names should herewith go on record, partly as an acknowledgement for a great courtesy received, partly as evidence of how human sympathies can cross all international lines:—

Great Britain.

The *Manchester Chamber of Commerce* cabled the British Chamber of Commerce in Shanghai urging it to vote for the Report.

The *British Section of the Women's International League* meeting in London endorsed the Report and sent that endorsement to the Shanghai Municipal Council and to the League of Nations.

The Continuation Committee of the great English Christian Conference, "*Copec*," reminded the Shanghai Municipal Council that at *Copec* in April, 1924, the conference expressed "its concern at the grave situation resulting from the introduction of western industrial methods in the east," and stated that the great body who are still banded together in England under

the *Copec* name, awaited with keen interest the action of Shanghai on the child labor matter.

The national *Y.W.C.A.* of Great Britain, and the World's Committee of the same organization from its headquarters in London, both cabled an expression of their backing of the work of the China *Y.W.C.A.* which was so intimately connected with this whole enterprise.

In the early summer it was stated in Parliament that *the British Government* has been keenly interested in the attempt to regulate industrial conditions in Shanghai.

Australia.

Mr. W. M. Hughes, *ex prime minister of Australia*, who helped draft the clauses in the Treaty of Versailles relating to labor, both cabled and wrote, expressing his endorsement of the child labor campaign.

The *Chamber of Commerce of Wellington, New Zealand*, sent their endorsement to the Shanghai Municipal Council.

The United States.

The *National Y.W.C.A.*, cabled the Joint Committee of Shanghai Women's Organizations which was the most active group in promoting the child labor campaign, in endorsement of the proposed measures.

Miss Mary Anderson, director of the *Women's Bureau* of the government *Department of Labor*, sent a message especially for the American citizens of Shanghai, expressing her conviction that insofar as American capital is invested in industries in China which are not regulated by right working standards, the United States is culpable in present child labor conditions in this country.

Miss Grace Abbott, head of the *Children's Bureau* of the *Department of Labor*, wrote for publication in Shanghai a statement of the status of child labor regulations in America.

Czecho-Slovakia.

Miss Alice Masaryk, daughter of the president, wrote of her hope that in that new republic "we will have a chance to learn of Chinese leaders," implying that the Chinese understanding of the rhythm of work can help to offset "the efficiency of an electric and steam civilization."

The members of the board of the *National Y.W.C.A.* in Prague also wrote of their keen interest in the child labor issue in China, borne of their realization, "at the very beginning of our young Republic, of how very important a part of the state the child is." Among the signatures to this letter were those of the wives of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the President of the Parliament, the Minister of Social Welfare, the Minister of Education and the President of Agriculture.

Japan.

Miss Y. Yumada, secretary of the *Society for the Harmonization of Labor and Capital*, came to Shanghai for a few weeks during the campaign to study industrial conditions in China. Through her interest after her return to Japan, a meeting was called of several leading organizations, the *Women's Federation*, the *Peace Society*, the *W.C.T.U.*, and the *Shanghaianders' Association of Tokyo*, as a result of which a personal letter was sent to every Japanese voter in Shanghai asking him to vote for the child labor byelaw.

Mr. Bunji Susuki, president of the *General Federation of Labor in Japan*, stopped in Shanghai en route to the International Labor Conference in Geneva, to speak to groups of his countrymen in behalf of the byelaw.

While in every other instance we are listing assistance received from outside the country, it does not seem possible to give this roll-call without mention of *Professor and Mrs. Y. Sakamoto* of Tung Wen College, Shanghai, who out of their deep Christian conviction as to the value of human life, gave lavishly of time and strength to the child labor campaign.

India.

Mr. N. M. Joshi of the *Servants of India Society*, wrote to Miss Dingman regarding the success of labor legislation under the somewhat similar conditions obtaining in India.

One of the strongest evidences of the feasibility of putting such measures in force in an oriental labor market came in a statement contributed for use in the Shanghai campaign by *Tata Sons* of Bombay, the largest employer of labor in India, who heartily endorsed the proposed measure for Shanghai, on the basis of the indubitable success of the legislation brought about under the Indian Factory Act.

France.

Letters of ardent interest and endorsement were received from the following:—

The French National Council of Women, French Women's Alliance, and French Young Women's Christian Association.

The French Women's Union for the League of Nations.

M. Justin Godert, and M. George Scelles, minister and secretary of the department of labor.

M. P. Appell, of the University of Paris.

Dr. P. Armand-Delille, of the International Association for Child Welfare

M. Wilfred Monod for the Faculty of Protestant Theology.

M. Paul Fuzier for the Protestant Committee on Friendly Relations with Strangers.

M. Emile Borel, ex-minister of finance.

M. Max Lazard, of the Labor Party.

Of more than ordinary significance was a letter received by Miss Dingman from M. Fontaine, president of the Administrative Council of the International Labor Bureau in Geneva, officially stating that the Labor Office was taking steps to "act on behalf of the young Chinese workers" and bringing the matter to the attention of the various governments concerned.

LETTERS—resolutions—cables—words! not action. But bring all these together and consider the pattern they begin to form, of good will, and keen concern, around the world. International action is remarkably new to all of us as yet, and this first casting of small threads across the spaces that divide us may seem as futile as the spider's slight filament. But watch them by degrees strengthen into unbreakable bonds. It has not long been possible that an effort to guard the children in one oriental city should evoke warm and sympathetic response from eight other lands. A weaving has started that will not easily be stopped.

MEANWHILE, what happened in Shanghai? A vivid chapter in the history of international relations, with a denouncement more startling to the promoters of the campaign than could have been dreamed.

The foreign ratepayers of Shanghai tried to hold their regular annual meeting on April 15, in the spring of 1925. The backers of the child labor campaign saw all their work of that winter blocked when, for lack of a quorum, the meeting in the Town Hall was dismissed soon after the hour.

For six years these annual meetings had failed for lack of a quorum. It was thought that the unusual publicity which the child labor campaign had attracted would bring out the required nine hundred votes, but it did not so happen. The goal had been so nearly reached, however, that a large group of business men, under the leadership of the British Acting Consul petitioned the Municipal Council to call a special meeting of voters on the second of June. The promoters of the child labor byelaw would have preferred it if this measure could have been considered alone, but the Municipal Council announced that the other measures which had been on the agenda for April 15, would also be voted upon at this meeting, notably the "press law," whereby printed, typewritten or mimeographed material issued or dispersed in the Settlement would have to bear the imprint of the individual or group issuing it, and all sponsors of such material be officially registered. There was mounting opposition on the part of the

Chinese to this curtailment of freedom of the press, and above all, to the granting to the foreign authorities of any more evidences of power.

Day by day, as June 2 drew near, it became clearer to those watching most carefully, that the very promotion of the child labor meeting was likely to bring about also the passage of other laws which would arouse the most bitter resentment. Thirty leading Chinese organizations or firms issued a manifesto endorsing the child labor measure (though indicating that they would have preferred it to have conformed more closely to the provisional labor legislation drafted by the Peking Government), but opposing the other measures in the strongest terms. Twice Miss Dingman attempted to get some clearer understanding among some of the foreigners most interested regarding the Chinese opposition to the press law, but the obscurity in which the Chinese and foreign groups are cut off from understanding each other's real motives in a community such as this blocked the way. For reasons which had been gaining strength all winter, feeling against all forms of foreign control was beginning to run very high. The child labor issue,—an entirely separate matter, had by sheer chance become entangled in both time and circumstance, with the outbreak which was due anyway at about this time.

On May 30 the now famous "Shanghai Affair" broke out. Student agitation, arising from the previous killing of a Chinese laborer in a Japanese mill, attracted a mob on the principal street of the city. Several Chinese students were shot to death by the foreign police. The city was put under martial law.

The rest of the story of the demonstrations in Shanghai is more or less familiar. Tuesday, the second of June, came and the Municipal Council let the second attempt at a meeting go forward although the city was tense with excitement from this other cause. The voters went to the Town Hall through streets cleared of Chinese and under military guard. When after some seven hundred people had sat in tense silence for fifteen minutes, and the chairman announced in Alice in Wonderland terms that again owing to the lack of a quorum,

the special meeting of the ratepayers "had never been held," those who had given months of work to bring the child labor byelaw to a vote were in the extraordinary position of being among the most relieved people in the hall. A few minutes after the adjournment of the meeting, several more people were killed on the street near the Town Hall. Had the measures gone through, it is probable that uncontrollable forces would have been released.

For there are inexorable laws of the spirit, and they had worked their will again. Government by force never governs, in the long run, and Chinese patience with foreign aggression, long as it is, had again run short. By circumstances entirely unforeseen, the child labor bill had become associated with these other measures which were bitterly opposed. It had seemed the fair thing to put the Foreign Settlement in order first, as regarded child labor, since China could not hope to regulate her own territory for so long. But even these beneficent measures, coupled with the great irritant of the press law, meant one more recognition of foreign authority and under the strained circumstances of the particular time it was undoubtedly better that it should fail.

SO the industrial history of the Y.W.C.A., at least,—for that is the one group for which we speak here although this will continue to be the effort of the united Christian Church, now enters in China upon a new phase. Many more thousands of children will go into the mills—but an even larger issue has been raised than their release from work. All concerned in social justice in China will have to see that it is brought about from *within*, from the will of the Chinese people themselves. But that will is at present embittered by the unequal treaties, the extra-territorial rights, the military and political aggressions of other powers, which loom so large that the best way to help China put her own house in order will be to think out a Christian solution for these problems first.

If in Shanghai itself legislation must wait for a time, nevertheless the four years of effort cannot have been wasted.

Many of the most prominent employers, of several nationalities, went on record during the campaign as strongly approving the child labor measures; it is more than likely that they will attempt to apply them to their own mills. The "seed of uneasiness" has been widely sown, and is certain to bear fruit.

The Young Women's Christian Association is far-flung, and can set in motion in many countries at the same time, the kind of education that will help to make this a fairer world. Here lie two letters, side by side. One of them, headed New York City, tells of the pledge recently taken by the thousands of industrial members of the American Y.W.C.A., through their representatives at the last national convention, to make "a two-year study of the life of women of industry in the orient," and calls upon the Association in China to help them secure necessary material. The other is headed Chengtu, China's westernmost city, and says, "We had some girls come in from a factory to our Y.W.C.A. student conference and tell us all about their work. Their simple answers to the student's questions were a revelation to the more privileged girls, which will change their thinking."

Four years ago, not a Chinese woman was giving full time to the preventive side of industrial work. It is good to think of the two experienced Chinese secretaries now on the national Y.W.C.A. staff to carry forward a program of education.

THE threads reach out to nation after nation, binding them all together in good will for those who work with hands for all the rest. A piece of weaving has started that is a part of the whole process of making this into one friendly world.

"My idea of a King?

God.

My concept of Empire?

The whole sweet earth."

(ARNO NADEL).

